

## The Three Waves of Modernity

Toward the end of World War I, there appeared a book with the ominous title *The Decline, or Setting, of the West*. Spengler understood by the West not what we are in the habit of calling Western Civilization, the civilization that originated in Greece, but a culture which emerged around the year 1000 in Northern Europe; it includes, above all, modern western culture. He predicted then the decline, or setting, of modernity. His book was a powerful document to the crisis of modernity. That such a crisis exists is now obvious to the meanest capacities. To understand the crisis of modernity, we must first understand the character of modernity.

The crisis of modernity reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern western man no longer knows what he wants—that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. Until a few generations ago, it was generally taken for granted that man can know what is right and wrong, what is the just or the good or the best order of society—in a word that political philosophy is possible and necessary. In our time this faith has lost its power. According to the predominant view, political philosophy is impossible: it was a dream, perhaps a noble dream, but at any rate a dream. While there is broad agreement on this point, opinions



differ as to why political philosophy was based on a fundamental error. According to a very widespread view, all knowledge which deserves the name is scientific knowledge; but scientific knowledge cannot validate value judgments; it is limited to factual judgments; yet political philosophy presupposes that value judgments can be rationally validated. According to a less widespread but more sophisticated view, the predominant separation of facts from values is not tenable: the categories of theoretical understanding imply, somehow, principles of evaluation; but those principles of evaluation together with the categories of understanding are historically variable; they change from epoch to epoch; hence it is impossible to answer the question of right and wrong or of the best social order in a universally valid manner, in a manner valid for all historical epochs, as political philosophy requires.

The crisis of modernity is then primarily the crisis of modern political philosophy. This may seem strange: why should the crisis of a culture primarily be the crisis of one academic pursuit among many? But political philosophy is not essentially an academic pursuit: the majority of the great political philosophers were not university professors. Above all, as is generally admitted, modern culture is emphatically rationalistic, believing in the power of reason; surely if such a culture loses its faith in reason's ability to validate its highest aims, it is in a crisis.

What then is the peculiarity of modernity? According to a very common notion, modernity is secularized biblical faith; the other-worldly biblical faith has become radically this-worldly. Most simply: not to hope for life in heaven but to establish heaven on earth by purely human means. But this is exactly what Plato claims to do in his *Republic*: to bring about the cessation of all evil on earth by purely human means. And surely Plato cannot be said to have secularized biblical faith. If one wishes to speak of the secularization of biblical faith, one must then be somewhat more specific. E.g., it is asserted that the spirit of modern



capitalism is of puritan origin. Or, to give another example, Hobbes conceives of man in terms of a fundamental polarity of evil pride and salutary fear of violent death; everyone can see that this is a secularized version of the biblical polarity of sinful pride and salutary fear of the Lord. Secularization means, then, the preservation of thoughts, feelings, or habits of biblical origin after the loss or atrophy of biblical faith. But this definition does not tell us anything as to what kind of ingredients are preserved in secularizations. Above all it does not tell us what secularization is, except negatively: loss or atrophy of biblical faith. Yet modern man was originally guided by a positive project. Perhaps that positive project could not have been conceived without the help of surviving ingredients of biblical faith; but whether this is in fact the case cannot be decided before one has understood that project itself.

But can one speak of a single project? Nothing is more characteristic of modernity than the immense variety and the frequency of radical change within it. The variety is so great that one may doubt whether one can speak of modernity as something which is one. Mere chronology does not establish meaningful unity: there may be thinkers in modern times who do not think in a modern manner. How then can one escape arbitrariness or subjectivism? By modernity we understand a radical modification of premodern political philosophy—a modification which comes to sight first as a rejection of premodern political philosophy. If premodern political philosophy possesses a fundamental unity, a physiognomy of its own, modern political philosophy, its opponent, will have the same distinction at least by reflection. We are led to see that this is in fact the case after having fixed the beginning of modernity by means of a nonarbitrary criterion. If modernity emerged through a break with premodern thought, the great minds who achieved that break must have been aware of what they were doing. Who, then, is the first political philosopher who explicitly rejected all earlier political philosophy as funda-



mentally insufficient and even unsound? There is no difficulty regarding the answer: the man in question was Hobbes. Yet closer study shows that Hobbes's radical break with the tradition of political philosophy only continues, if in a very original manner, what had been done in the first place by Machiavelli. Machiavelli questioned, in fact, no less radically than Hobbes the value of traditional political philosophy; he claimed, in fact, no less clearly than Hobbes that the true political philosophy begins with him, although he stated his claim in a somewhat more subdued language than Hobbes was going to do.

There are two utterances of Machiavelli which indicate his broad intention with the greatest clarity. The first is to this effect: Machiavelli is in profound disagreement with the view of others regarding how a prince should conduct himself toward his subjects or friends; the reason for this disagreement is that he is concerned with the factual, practical truth and not with fancies; many have imagined commonwealths and principalities which never were, because they looked at how men ought to live instead of how men do in fact live. Machiavelli opposes to the idealism of traditional political philosophy a realistic approach to political things. But this is only half of the truth (or in other words his realism is of a peculiar kind). The other half is stated by Machiavelli in these terms: fortuna is a woman who can be controlled by the use of force. To understand the bearing of these two utterances, one must remind oneself of the fact that classical political philosophy was a quest for the best political order, or the best regime as a regime most conducive to the practice of virtue or of how men should live, and that according to classical political philosophy the establishment of the best regime depends necessarily on uncontrollable, elusive fortuna or chance. According to Plato's *Republic*, e.g., the coming into being of the best regime depends on the coincidence, the unlikely coming together, of philosophy and political power. The so-called realist Aristotle agrees with Plato in these two



most important respects: the best regime is the order most conducive to the practice of virtue, and the actualization of the best regime depends on chance. For according to Aristotle the best regime cannot be established if the proper matter is not available, i.e., if the nature of the available territory and of the available people is not fit for the best regime; whether or not that matter is available depends in no way on the art of the founder, but on chance. Machiavelli seems to agree with Aristotle by saying that one cannot establish the desirable political order if the matter is corrupt, i.e., if the people is corrupt; but what for Aristotle is an impossibility is for Machiavelli only a very great difficulty: the difficulty can be overcome by an outstanding man who uses extraordinary means in order to transform a corrupt matter into a good matter; that obstacle to the establishment of the best regime which is man as matter, the human material, can be overcome because that matter can be transformed.

What Machiavelli calls the imagined commonwealths of the earlier writers is based on a specific understanding of nature which he rejects, at least implicitly. According to that understanding, all natural beings, at least all living beings, are directed towards an end, a perfection for which they long; there is a specific perfection which belongs to each specific nature; there is especially perfection of man which is determined by the nature of man as the rational and social animal. Nature supplies the standard, a standard wholly independent of man's will; this implies that nature is good. Man has a definite place within the whole, a very exalted place; one can say that man is the measure of all things or that man is the microcosm, but he occupies that place by nature; man has his place in an order which he did not originate. "Man is the measure of all things" is the very opposite of "man is the master of all things." Man has a place within the whole: man's power is limited; man cannot overcome the limitations of his nature. Our nature is enslaved in many ways (Aristotle) or we are the playthings



of the gods (Plato). This limitation shows itself in particular in the ineluctable power of chance. The good life is the life according to nature, which means to stay within certain limits; virtue is essentially moderation. There is no difference in this respect between classical political philosophy and classical hedonism which is unpolitical: not the maximum of pleasures but the purest pleasures are desirable; happiness depends decisively on the limitation of our desires.

In order to judge properly of Machiavelli's doctrine, we must consider that in the crucial respect there is agreement between classical philosophy and the Bible, between Athens and Jerusalem, despite the profound difference and even antagonism between Athens and Jerusalem. According to the Bible man is created in the image of God; he is given the rule over all terrestrial creatures: he is not given the rule over the whole; he has been put into a garden to work it and to guard it; he has been assigned a place; righteousness is obedience to the divinely established order, just as in classical thought justice is compliance with the natural order; to the recognition of elusive chance corresponds the recognition of inscrutable providence.

Machiavelli rejects the whole philosophic and theological tradition. We can state his reasoning as follows. The traditional views either lead to the consequence that the political things are not taken seriously (Epicureanism) or else that they are understood in the light of an imaginary perfection—of imagined commonwealths and principalities, the most famous of them being the kingdom of God. One must start from how men do live; one must lower one's sights. The immediate corollary is the reinterpretation of virtue: virtue must not be understood as that for the sake of which the commonwealth exists, but virtue exists exclusively for the sake of the commonwealth; political life proper is not subject to morality; morality is not possible outside of political society; it presupposes political society; political society cannot be established and preserved by



staying within the limits of morality, for the simple reason that the effect or the conditioned cannot precede the cause or condition. Furthermore, the establishment of political society and even of the most desirable political society does not depend on chance, for chance can be conquered or corrupt matter can be transformed into incorrupt matter. There is a guarantee for the solution of the political problem because a) the goal is lower, i.e., in harmony with what most men actually desire and b) chance can be conquered. The political problem becomes a technical problem. As Hobbes puts it, "when commonwealths come to be dissolved by intestine discord, the fault is not in men as they are the matter but as they are the makers of them." The matter is not corrupt or vicious; there is no evil in men which cannot be controlled; what is required is not divine grace, morality, nor formation of character, but institutions with teeth in them. Or, to quote Kant, the establishment of the right social order does not require, as people are in the habit of saying, a nation of angels: "hard as it may sound, the problem of establishing the state [i.e., the just state] is soluble even for a nation of devils, provided they have sense," i.e., provided their selfishness is enlightened; the fundamental political problem is simply one of "a good organization of the state of which man is indeed capable."

In order to do justice to the change effected by Machiavelli, one must consider two great changes which occurred after his time but which were in harmony with his spirit. The first is the revolution in natural science, i.e., the emergence of modern natural science. The rejection of final causes (and therewith also of the concept of chance) destroyed the theoretical basis of classical political philosophy. The new natural science differs from the various forms of the older one not only because of its new understanding of nature but also and especially because of its new understanding of science: knowledge is no longer understood as with man, not with the cosmic order; in seeking knowledge fundamentally receptive; the initiative in understanding is



man calls nature before the tribunal of his reason; he "puts nature to the question" (Bacon); knowing is a kind of making; human understanding prescribes nature its laws; man's power is infinitely greater than was hitherto believed; not only can man transform corrupt human matter into incorrupt human matter, or conquer chance—all truth and meaning originate in man; they are not inherent in a cosmic order which exists independently of man's activity. Correspondingly, poetry is no longer understood as inspired imitation or reproduction but as creativity. The purpose of science is reinterpreted: *propter potentiam*, for the relief of man's estate, for the conquest of nature, for the maximum control, the systematic control of the natural conditions of human life. Conquest of nature implies that nature is the enemy, a chaos to be reduced to order; everything good is due to man's labor rather than to nature's gift: nature supplies only the almost worthless materials. Accordingly the political society is in no way natural: the state is simply an artifact, due to covenants; man's perfection is not the natural end of man but an ideal freely formed by man.

The second post-Machiavellian change which is in harmony with his spirit concerns political or moral philosophy alone. Machiavelli had completely severed the connection between politics and natural law or natural right, i.e., with justice understood as something independent of human arbitrariness. The Machiavellian revolution acquired its full force only when that connection was restored: when justice, or natural right, were reinterpreted in Machiavelli's spirit. This was the work primarily of Hobbes. One can describe the change effected by Hobbes as follows: whereas prior to him natural law was understood in the light of a hierarchy of man's ends in which self-preservation occupied the lowest place, Hobbes understood natural law in terms of self-preservation alone; in connection with this, natural law came to be understood primarily in terms of the right of self-preservation as distinguished from any obligation or duty—a development which culminates in the substitution



of the rights of man for natural law (nature replaced by man, law replaced by rights). Already in Hobbes himself the natural right to self-preservation includes the right to "corporeal liberty" and to a condition in which man is not weary of life: it approaches the right to comfortable self-preservation which is the pivot of Locke's teaching. I can here only assert that the increased emphasis on economics is a consequence of this. Eventually we arrive at the view that universal affluence and peace is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect justice.

The second wave of modernity begins with Rousseau. He changed the moral climate of the west as profoundly as Machiavelli. Just as I did in the case of Machiavelli, I shall describe the character of Rousseau's thought by commenting on two or three sentences of his. The characteristics of the first wave of modernity were the reduction of the moral and political problem to a technical problem, and the concept of nature as in need of being overlaid by civilization as a mere artifact. Both characteristics became the targets of Rousseau's critique. As for the first, "the ancient politicians spoke unceasingly of manners and virtue; ours speak of nothing but trade and money." Rousseau protested in the name of virtue, of the genuine, nonutilitarian virtue of the classical republics against the degrading and enervating doctrines of his predecessors; he opposed both the stifling spirit of the absolute monarchy and the more or less cynical commercialism of the modern republics. Yet he could not restore the classical concept of virtue as the natural end of man, as the perfection of man's nature; he was forced to reinterpret virtue because he took over the modern concept of the state of nature as the state in which man finds himself at the beginning. He did not merely take over this concept from Hobbes and Hobbes's successors; he thought it through to its conclusion: "the philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all of them felt the necessity to go back to the state of nature, but not one of them has arrived there." Rousseau did arrive there be-



cause he saw that man in the state of nature is a man stripped of everything which he has acquired by his own efforts. Man in the state of nature is subhuman or pre-human; his humanity or rationality have been acquired in a long process. In post-Rousseauian language, man's humanity is due not to nature but to history, to the historical process, a singular or unique process which is not teleological: the end of the process or its peak was not foreseen or foreseeable but it came to sight only with the approach of the possibility of fully actualizing man's rationality or humanity. The concept of history, i.e., of the historical process as a single process in which man becomes human without intending it, is a consequence of Rousseau's radicalization of the Hobbesian concept of the state of nature.

Yet how can we know that a certain state in man's development is the peak? Or, more generally, how can we distinguish good from bad if man is by nature subhuman, if the state of nature is subhuman? Let us repeat: Rousseau's natural man lacks not merely, as Hobbes's natural man does, sociality, but rationality as well; he is not the rational animal but the animal which is a free agent or, more precisely, which possesses an almost unlimited perfectibility or malleability. But how ought he to be molded or to mold himself? Man's nature seems to be wholly insufficient to give him guidance. The guidance which it gives him is limited to this: under certain conditions, i.e., in a certain stage of his development, man is unable to preserve himself except by establishing civil society; yet he would endanger his self-preservation if he did not make sure that civil society has a definite structure, a structure conducive to his self-preservation: man must get within society the full equivalent of the freedom which he possessed in the state of nature; all members of society must be equally subject and wholly subject to the laws to the making of which everyone must have been able to contribute; there must not be any possibility of appealing from the laws, the positive laws, to a higher law, a natural law, for such an



appeal would endanger the rule of laws. The source of the positive law, and of nothing but the positive law, is the general will; a will inherent or immanent in properly constituted society takes the place of the transcendent natural law. Modernity started from the dissatisfaction with the gulf between the is and the ought, the actual and the ideal; the solution suggested in the first wave was: to bring the ought nearer to the is by lowering the ought, by conceiving of the ought as not making too high demands on men, or as being in agreement with man's most powerful and most common passion; in spite of this lowering, the fundamental difference between the is and the ought remained; even Hobbes could not simply deny the legitimacy of the appeal from the is, the established order, to the ought, the natural or moral law. Rousseau's concept of the general will which as such cannot err—which by merely being is what it ought to be—showed how the gulf between the is and the ought can be overcome. Strictly speaking, Rousseau showed this only under the condition that his doctrine of the general will, his political doctrine proper, is linked with his doctrine of the historical process, and this linking was the work of Rousseau's great successors, Kant and Hegel, rather than of Rousseau himself. According to this view, the rational or just society, the society characterized by the existence of a general will known to be the general will, i.e., the ideal, is necessarily actualized by the historical process without men's intending to actualize it.

Why can the general will not err? Why is the general will necessarily good? The answer is: it is good because it is rational, and it is rational because it is general; it emerges through the generalization of the particular will, of the will which as such is not good. What Rousseau has in mind is the necessity in a republican society for everyone to transform his wishes, his demands on his fellows, into the form of laws; he cannot leave it at saying: "I do not wish to pay taxes"; he must propose a law abolishing taxes; in transforming his wish into a possible law, he realizes the folly



of his primary or particular will. It is then the mere generality of a will which vouches for its goodness; it is not necessary to have recourse to any substantive consideration, to any consideration of what man's nature, his natural perfection, requires. This epoch-making thought reached full clarity in Kant's moral doctrine: the sufficient test for the goodness of maxims is their susceptibility of becoming principles of universal legislation; the mere form of rationality, i.e. universality, vouches for the goodness of the content. Therefore, the moral laws, as laws of freedom, are no longer understood as natural laws. Moral and political ideals are established without reference to man's nature: man is radically liberated from the tutelage of nature. Arguments against the ideal which are taken from man's nature, as known by the uncontestable experience of the ages, are no longer of importance: what is called man's nature is merely the result of man's development hitherto; it is merely man's past, which cannot give any guidance for man's possible future; the only guidance regarding the future, regarding what men ought to do or aspire to, is supplied by reason. Reason replaces nature. This is the meaning of the assertion that the ought has no basis whatever in the is.

This much about Rousseau's thought which inspired Kant and German idealistic philosophy, the philosophy of freedom. But there is another fundamental thought of Rousseau, no less important than the one indicated which was indeed abandoned by Kant and his successors but which bore fruit in another part of the modern globe. German idealism accepted and radicalized the notion of the general will and the implications of that concept. It abandoned Rousseau's own qualification of this line of reasoning. "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. How has this change taken place? I do not know. What can make that change legitimate? I believe I can answer that question." I.e.: the free society, the society characterized by the existence within it of a general will, is distinguished from a despotically ruled society as legitimate



bondage from illegitimate bondage; it is itself bondage. Man cannot find his freedom in any society; he can find his freedom only by returning from society, however good and legitimate, to nature. In other words, self-preservation, the content of the fundamental natural right from which the social contract is derived, is not the fundamental fact; self-preservation would not be good if mere life, mere existence, were not good. The goodness of mere existence is experienced in the sentiment of existence. It is this sentiment which gives rise to the concern with preservation of existence, to all human activity; but that concern prevents the fundamental enjoyment and makes man miserable. Only by returning to the fundamental experience can man become happy; only few men are able to achieve this while almost all men are capable of acting in conformity with the derivative right of self-preservation, i.e. of living as citizens. Of the citizen it is required that he does his duty; the citizen must be virtuous. But virtue is not goodness. Goodness (sensibility, compassion) without a sense of duty or obligation, without effort—no virtue without effort—is the preserve of the natural man, of the man who lives on the fringes of society without being a part of it. There is an unbridgeable gulf between the world of virtue, reason, moral freedom, history on the one hand and nature, natural freedom, and goodness on the other.

At this point a general remark on the notion of modernity seems to be appropriate. Modernity was understood from the beginning in contradistinction to antiquity; modernity could therefore include the medieval world. The difference between the modern and the medieval on the one hand, and antiquity on the other, was reinterpreted around 1800 as the difference between the romantic and the classic. In the narrower sense, romanticism meant the movement of thought and feeling which was initiated by Rousseau. Surely romanticism is more clearly modern than classicism in any of its forms. Perhaps the greatest document of the fertile conflict between modernity and antiquity



understood as the conflict between the romantic and the classic is Goethe's *Faust*. Faust is called by the Lord himself "a good man." That good man commits atrocious crimes, both private and public ones. I shall not speak here of the fact that he is redeemed by performing salutary public action, an action which enables him to stand on free soil with a free people, and that this salutary political action is not criminal or revolutionary but strictly legitimate: it is rendered possible by his receiving a fief from the German emperor. I limit myself to stressing the fact that Faust's goodness is decidedly not virtue—i.e., that the moral horizon of Goethe's most famous work has been opened by Rousseau. It is true that Faust's goodness is not identical with goodness in Rousseau's sense. While Rousseau's goodness goes together with abstention from action, with a kind of rest, Faust's goodness is unrest, infinite striving, dissatisfaction with everything finite, finished, complete, "classic." The significance of Faust for modernity, for the way in which modern man understands himself as modern man, was properly appreciated by Spengler, who called modern man Faustic man. We may say that Spengler replaced "romantic" by "Faustic" in describing the character of modernity.

Just as the second wave of modernity is related to Rousseau, the third wave is related to Nietzsche. Rousseau confronts us with the antinomy of nature on the one hand, and of civil society, reason, morality, history on the other, in such a way that the fundamental phenomenon is the beatific sentiment of existence—of union and communion with nature—which belongs altogether on the side of nature as distinguished from reason and society. The third wave may be described as being constituted by a new understanding of the sentiment of existence: that sentiment is the experience of terror and anguish rather than of harmony and peace, and it is the sentiment of historic existence as necessarily tragic; the human problem is indeed insoluble as a social problem, as Rousseau had said, but there is no escape from the human to nature; there is no possi-



bility of genuine happiness, or the highest of which man is capable has nothing to do with happiness.

I quote Nietzsche: "All philosophers have the common defect that they start from present-day man and believe that they can reach their goal by an analysis of present-day man. Lack of historical sense is the inherited defect of all philosophers." Nietzsche's critique of all earlier philosophers is a restatement of Rousseau's critique of all earlier philosophers. But what makes much sense in Rousseau is very strange in Nietzsche; for between Rousseau and Nietzsche there has taken place the discovery of history; the century between Rousseau and Nietzsche is the age of historical sense. Nietzsche implies: the essence of history has hitherto been misunderstood. The most powerful philosopher of history was Hegel. For Hegel the historical process was a rational and reasonable process, a progress, culminating in the rational state, the postrevolutionary state. Christianity is the true or absolute religion; but Christianity consists in its reconciliation with the world, the *saeculum*, in its complete secularization, a process begun with the Reformation, continued by the Enlightenment, and completed in the postrevolutionary state, which is the first state consciously based upon the recognition of the rights of man. In the case of Hegel, we are indeed compelled to say that the essence of modernity is secularized Christianity, for secularization is Hegel's conscious and explicit intention. According to Hegel there is then a peak and end of history; this makes it possible for him to reconcile the idea of philosophic truth with the fact that every philosopher is a son of his time: the true and final philosophy belongs to the absolute moment in history, to the peak of history. Post-Hegelian thought rejected the notion that there can be an end or peak of history, i.e., it understood the historical process as unfinished and unfinishable, and yet it maintained the now baseless belief in the rationality or progressive character of the historical process. Nietzsche was the first to face this situation. The insight that all principles of



thought and action are historical cannot be attenuated by the baseless hope that the historical sequence of these principles is progressive or that the historical process has an intrinsic meaning, an intrinsic directedness. All ideals are the outcome of human creative acts, of free human projects that form that horizon within which specific cultures were possible; they do not order themselves into a system; and there is no possibility of a genuine synthesis of them. Yet all known ideals claimed to have an objective support: in nature or in god or in reason. The historical insight destroys that claim and therewith all known ideals. But precisely the realization of the true origin of all ideals—in human creations or projects—makes possible a radically new kind of project, the transvaluation of all values, a project that is in agreement with the new insight yet not deducible from it (for otherwise it would not be due to a creative act).

But does all this not imply that the truth has finally been discovered—the truth about all possible principles of thought and action? Nietzsche seems to hesitate between admitting this and presenting his understanding of the truth as his project or his interpretation. Yet in fact he did the former; he believed he had discovered the fundamental unity between man's creativity and all beings: "wherever I found life, I found will to power." The transvaluation of all values which Nietzsche tries to achieve is ultimately justified by the fact that its root is the highest will to power—a higher will to power than the one which gave rise to all earlier values. Not man as he hitherto was, even at his highest, but only the Over-man will be able to live in accordance with the transvaluation of all values. The final insight into being leads to the final ideal. Nietzsche does not, like Hegel, claim that the final insight succeeds the actualization of the final ideal but rather that the final insight opens the way for the actualization of the final ideal. In this respect Nietzsche's view resembles Marx's. But there is this fundamental difference between Nietzsche and Marx:



for Marx the coming of the classless society is necessary, whereas for Nietzsche the coming of the Over-man depends on man's free choice. Only one thing is certain for Nietzsche regarding the future: the end has come for man as he was hitherto; what will come is either the Over-man or the Last-man. The last man, the lowest and most decayed man, the herd man without any ideals and aspirations, but well fed, well clothed, well housed, well medicated by ordinary physicians and by psychiatrists is Marx's man of the future seen from an anti-Marxist point of view. Yet in spite of the radical opposition between Marx and Nietzsche, the final state of the peak is characterized in the eyes of both Marx and Nietzsche by the fact that it marks the end of the rule of chance: man will be for the first time the master of his fate.

There is one difficulty peculiar to Nietzsche. For Nietzsche all genuinely human life, every high culture has necessarily a hierarchic or aristocratic character; the highest culture of the future must be in accordance with the natural order of rank among men which Nietzsche, in principle, understands along Platonic lines. Yet how can there be a natural order of rank, given the, so to speak, infinite power of the Over-man? For Nietzsche, too, the fact that almost all men are defective or fragmentary cannot be due to an authoritative nature but can be no more than an inheritance of the past, or of history as it has developed hitherto. To avoid this difficulty, i.e. to avoid the longing for the equality of all men when man is at the peak of his power, Nietzsche needs nature or the past as authoritative or at least inescapable. Yet since it is no longer for him an undeniable fact, he must will it, or postulate it. This is the meaning of his doctrine of eternal return. The return of the past, of the whole past, must be willed, if the Over-man is to be possible.

Surely the nature of man is will to power and this means on the primary level the will to overpower others: man does not by nature will equality. Man derives enjoyment from



overpowering others as well as himself. Whereas Rousseau's natural man is compassionate, Nietzsche's natural man is cruel.

What Nietzsche says in regard to political action is much more indefinite and vague than what Marx says. In a sense, all political use of Nietzsche is a perversion of his teaching. Nevertheless, what he said was read by political men and inspired them. He is as little responsible for fascism as Rousseau is responsible for Jacobinism. This means, however, that he is as much responsible for fascism as Rousseau was for Jacobinism.

I draw a political conclusion from the foregoing remarks. The theory of liberal democracy, as well as of communism, originated in the first and second waves of modernity; the political implication of the third wave proved to be fascism. Yet this undeniable fact does not permit us to return to the earlier forms of modern thought: the critique of modern rationalism or of the modern belief in reason by Nietzsche cannot be dismissed or forgotten. This is the deepest reason for the crisis of liberal democracy. The theoretical crisis does not necessarily lead to a practical crisis, for the superiority of liberal democracy to communism, Stalinist or post-Stalinist, is obvious enough. And above all, liberal democracy, in contradistinction to communism and fascism, derives powerful support from a way of thinking which cannot be called modern at all: the premodern thought of our western tradition.